

## **Sheriff gets nearly \$600G to combat recidivism**

By Thor Jourgensen/ The Daily Item

LYNN - Essex Sheriff Frank Cousins said his job overseeing criminal offenders doesn't stop when they finish their sentences and walk out of the Middleton House of Correction or Lawrence Correctional Alternative Center.

Cousins said criminals who are from Lynn and returning to the city need jobs and educational opportunities waiting for them.

With \$593,000 provided by the U.S. Justice Department, he wants to provide "re-entry services" to released offenders working with Lynn-based Straight Ahead Ministries. Straight Ahead runs programs involving youthful offenders, including gang members, and tries to interest kids in replacing criminal activity with productive opportunities.

"This program will reduce the rate of recidivism in Lynn once it is fully operating," Cousins said, adding, "It attacks the current problem - which is not providing offender with the follow-up supervision they need upon their release from custody."

Cousins' re-entry program calls for Straight Ahead workers to visit the Middleton and Lawrence jails and explain to offenders how the program can help them after they leave jail. After an initial meeting, the workers talk to inmates about setting long and short term goals for their post-jail lives.

The offenders draw up what Cousins described as "individual blueprints" for their lives and, with the workers' help, identify ways they can use rehabilitation program skills they learned during incarceration to improve their lives once they leave Lawrence or Middleton. Cousins plans to develop the re-entry program through 2015 with 50 offenders, ages 18 to 25 years old from Lynn, initially involved.

"Now, once this program is operational, we will be able to continue to monitor these offenders' programs upon their release. By giving the offenders the services they need, they will not be so apt to re-offend," Cousins said.